Returning unto God the great concernment of a Covenant People.

OR

A SERMON

Preached to the second Church in Boston *in* New-England, *March* 17. 16$\frac{79}{80}$. *when that Church did solemnly and explicitly* Renew their Covenant *with God, and one with another.*

By *INCREASE MATHER* Teacher of that Church.

2. Sam 7.24. *For thou hast confirmed to thyself thy People Israel, to be a People unto thee for ever: and thou, Lord, art become their God.*

2 Chron. 29.10. *Now it is mine heart to make a Covenant with the Lord God of Israel, that his fierce wrath may turn away from us.*

Ezra. 10.12. *Then all the Congregation answered, and said with a loud voice, As thou hast said, so must we doe.*

Jer. 18.7,8. *At what instant, I shall speak concerning a Nation, and concerning a Kingdome, to pluck up and to pull down, and to destroy it, if that nation against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil way; I will repent of the evil that I thought to doe unto them.*

BOSTON, Printed by *John Foster.* 1680.

To the ſecond Church of Chriſt in *Boſton* in *New-England.*

My dearly beloved.

THE Lord Jeſus ſaid to a Church of his, *as many as I love I rebuke and chaſten*; And this Church of his that I am now ſpeaking unto, hath experienced ſolemn Rebukes from him in the way of his Providence, and that for a long Time; yea from our firſt conſtitution. It was upon the fifth day of the fourth Moneth, 1630. That the Foundation of this Temple was laid. There is but one ſtone of that firſt building that doth now remain among us. The Eyes of thoſe ſo concerned, were (as ſome of you know) upon a dear Brother of mine, as deſirous that he might have been over them in the Lord. But God had greater Service for him to do, in three other Nations ſucceſſively, wherein he finiſhed his Miniſtry. Wherefore, it was five years before the Church was ſetled with any Officers; and then the Lord gave them a Paſtor and a Ruling Elder; which latter (though a good and choice ſpirited man) was in ſhort time, by bodily infirmityes rendred uncapable of attendance upon the work of his place, for many years, unto his death. Your Reverend Paſtor, God continued as a bleſſing unto you, for a conſiderable Time, even ſince, as well as before the Lord was pleaſed to caſt me (an unprofitable Creature) amongſt you, ſo that (through the grace of Chriſt) we both lived together in love and peace for the ſpace of eleven years; Albeit, his labours alſo, was God pleaſed to deprive you of, upwards of four years, before his courſe was finiſhed in this world: ſo that I have been left alone (yet not alone, if the Lord be with me) in the work of Chriſt for theſe 8 years laſt paſt. That I feel the burthen which I am under, my frequent calling upon you, to endeavour after a full ſupply of (eſpecially teaching) Officers in the Church, doth ſufficiently teſtify; yet I muſt confeſs, that I am almoſt aſtoniſhed, when I conſider how the Lord hath diſappointed hopes that way from time to time. There was one of our ſelves a *Luke*, a beloved Phyſitian, whom many (and for ought I know, all) of you had your thoughts upon, for improvement as a Ruling Elder in this Church; & it was in the purpoſe of my heart the next Church-meeting, to have mentioned him to you for that end; but the Lord by an unexpected ſtroke, ſnatched him away from us; who were not worthy that ſuch a bleſſing ſhould be any longer continued unto us. Alſo, another (a faithfull man) that was choſen, (though not ordained) by the Church unto ſome Office Relation therein, was immediately made unſerviceable, from that day to this, by reaſon of thoſe infirmityes that ſtill prevail over him. Theſe are very ſolemn rebukes of Chriſt, the Lord help us to underſtand his mind and meaning therein. That awfull Diſpenſation of Divine Providence which befell us above three years agoe, when *the houſe of God*, (for ſo doth the Scripture call thoſe places which are ſet apart for his worſhip, Pſal. 74. 8. & 83. 12.) was burnt with fire, and above forty dwellings near adjoyning, all conſumed in one ſad morning, I need not acquaint you with, for you have not forgotten it and the marks and Remembrances of thoſe Deſolations are ſtill dayly to be ſeen. You likewiſe know what a terrible

terrible diseases the Lord hath since that, visited us with, whereby eleven persons (besides many Children) belonging to this Church, have been removed from us, and some of them such as were an Ornament to the Church, as well as *the glory of Christ*, in respect of those spiritual gifts and graces that shined in them.

All these things, are Intimations from Heaven, that the Lord can easily *remove the Candlestick*, and that therefore it doth concern us as well as all (and much more then some) of the Churches in *New-England*, to be renewing the Ingagements of our Souls unto God in Jesus Christ, that so he may be pleased to walk amongst us, and continue the Tokens of his gracious presence in the midst of us. I rejoyce them, that God (who knoweth I have often begged that he would do so) hath bowed all your hearts to consent and concur in that sacred Covenant which was lately and solemnly renewed between the Lord, and each of our Souls.

And now (my Brethren, and the Lords people) the greatest work is yet to do, viz. *sincere endeavours to keep Covenant*. To help and further you wherein, there is printed a faithful word, preached by that Worthy Person, who spake unto you in the Name of the Lord, on the day wherein you had so solemnly Renewed your choice of the Lord to be your God. Read and practise as there you are exhorted; It is not only a weighty, but a seasonable word; and I am glad that so many of you have desired that it might in such a way be made publick. The Lord write it in every heart; And give us to be ever mindful of that good profession which we have made before many witnesses, yea in the hearing of Heaven and Earth; Men, and Angels too, that came down from Heaven to observe that dayes solemnity, have beheld us avouching the Lord to be our God, and the Lord did that day avouch us, and our Children with us, to be his people. The Covenant we have entred into (many of you having so desired in order to your being put in mind of the Obligation which is upon you) is published herewith; upon which account it will be like Joshua's stone, as, a monument of what hath been done, so, a witness against every man & woman that shall not make Conscience to perform his vows. Let us remember (I do beseech you) that the Eyes of the World are now upon us more then ever; Men will be enquiring, what fruit is there of such a solemn Transaction? And if we do not walk as becometh the Gospel, others will be discouraged from following the Example that hath been set before them, and they that bear ill will to Zion will reproach Religion and the holy wayes of Christ. On which accounts, better we had not vowed, then that we should vow and not pay. But if the Lord Jesus help us to do his Commandments according to those vows of God which are upon us, undoubtedly some special blessing is near at hand; At present we are under a divine probation; The Lord waits to see how we will acquit our selves. And in a more peculiar manner, that branch of the Covenant wherein we have engaged against the sins of the Times, ought most carefully to be remembred by us. Those evils are too many to be particularly mentioned in the Covenant: but therein we refer to what hath been declared by the Messengers of these Churches, that have convened to enquire into that matter.—Pride in Apparrel, is one of the sins of the Times, when persons goe above their Estates, & degrees, or take up such Fashions as become not serious Christians, It is a memorable passage, which I have met with, (and have sometimes put you in mind of) concerning certain Protestant Gentlewomen in *Ireland* that being robbed and stripped by the bloody and barbarous Papists, they called to mind *the third Chapter of Isaiah*, and said one to another, *This is come upon us for our excesse and pride in Apparrel*. Wherefore, beware of this sin, and know that if any of you or your Children that are under your power, be hereafter found guilty before the Lord in that respect, God will look upon you as Covenant breakers in his sight.

Again,

Again, Sinful drinking is one of the great ſins of the Times; And *Church-members* have too many of them given occaſion unto others to ſin, and to ſpeak evil of their holy profeſſion, by an unneceſſary frequenting Taverns, and ſpending many pretious hours, nay (which is lamentable to be ſpoken) dayes therein, which if they had ſpent half that time, in reading the Scriptures, and other good books, in prayer, and ſecret Communion with God, how happy would it have been for their Souls, and what a weight of glory ſhould they have been partakers of, at the laſt and great day.--Then be watchful, and for the future, be not ſeen in ſuch houſes except when you have juſt cauſe & call ſo to be. There are alſo Errors of the Times, Be zealous in bearing witneſs againſt them, love not little Errors, leſt God leave you to great ones. And charge your Children to abide in the Truth: It is a very ſad thing, that *the Riſing Generation* ſhould be in danger of running into the mouths of Wolves, though in Sheeps cloathing: Look diligently to your Children as to that thing alſo, Otherwiſe you remember not your Covenant, who have promiſed God in the preſence of Angels and men, that *you will do what in you is that your Children may be ſuch as thoſe that have the Lords Name put upon them ought to be*, but this you do not, if you ſuffer them to go where they will be in danger to be corrupted and perverted.

One thing more, let me ſtir up your pure minds by way of Remembrance, concerning it. We have in our Church Covenant, promiſed *faithfully to watch over one anothers Souls, and that more fully then heretofore.* O what a World of Iniquity would be prevented, if this branch of the *Covenant*, were duely obſerved? For the Truth is, that moſt of thoſe viſible evils which *Church-members* are guilty of, ariſe from neglects here. Men can ſpeak of one anothers faults behind their backs, but how few that do in love and faithfulneſs admoniſh them to their faces, when they ſee or hear that they do amiſs. Do we not know what befel the Children of Iſrael, when they did not ſo ſtrictly watch over Achan (who was a member amongſt them) as they ſhould have done? one man ſinned, and did not wrath fall upon all the Congregation, Joſh. 22.20. We had need then to be careful and vigilant about this matter. Not that every failing ſhould preſently be made a matter of Church cenſure, but *Scandals* are by *Diſcipline* to be removed, and leſſer Errors may ſometimes call for loving Reproofs, which if wiſely applyed, will promote the Intereſt of holineſs very much, in thoſe, whom *Holineſs doth become for ever*. Time was, when members of Churches in *New-England*, could not do or ſpeak evil, but one Brother or other would ſoon help them to ſee their Error. Let us remember thoſe Times and *do the firſt works*. The good ſucceſs of undertakings of this nature, depends much upon the manner and Spirit, wherewith they are managed: God would not have us to ſuffer ſin to lye upon any Brother, yet he requireth, that Inferiors ſhould be reſpective in their deportment towards thoſe that in gifts, place, Age, are their Superiors *Ye younger ſubmit your ſelves to the Elder, yea, all of you be ſubject one to another, and be clouthed with humility*, 1 Pet. 5.5.

I have no more at preſent, in this way to ſpeak unto you; only be not diſcouraged, if you meet with cenſures from Men, for what you have done according to the will of God.--Not long ſince we did (and bleſſed be God that put it into our hearts) ſet apart a day for Faſting and Prayer, that we might cry to Heaven, for converting grace, to be poured down upon our Children. One would have thought that none pretending to Religion, would have diſliked a work of that nature, yet what evil ſurmiſings, and cenſures from ſome men, have we upon that account, been the ſubjects of? Why? It was a *New practice*; as ſome of old complained that Chriſt taught a *new Doctrine*. The more our ſin and ſhame, if that which was long ago our duty be but newly, or not at all practiſed, The like meaſure we muſt look for, in reſpect of our late *ſolemn Tranſactions*.

But it is a comfortable thought, that if a man doth well, and bears ill for it; if he hath borne witness to the Truth, and against Sin, and promoted the interest of godliness in the hearts and lives of the Lords People, and is therefore hated, reviled, reproached, he meets with just such entertainment in the world, as did the holy Prophets and Apostles, and Martyrs; yea, and the Son of God himself. If then, God in his word doth declare that we have done well, let us not be discouraged in the way of duty; and the Lord doth so speak as to what we have done in promising (by the help of his grace and holy Spirit) that we will endeavour in all things to obey his voice. When the Children of Israel did so, the Lord said, *They have well said in all that they have spoken.* And O that it may appear, that we have made this Profession in sincerity, that there is such an heart in us, even an heart to fear the Lord our God, and keep all his Commandments, alwayes, that it may be well with us, and with our Children for ever. So I rest,

Yours in the Lord Jesus,

April 19. 1680.

Increase Mather.

Return.

Returning unto God the great Concernment of a Covenant People.

Hos. 14. 1. *O Israel, Return unto the Lord thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine Iniquity.*

THese Words, are a gracious Invitation from Heaven, unto a sinfull backsliding People: in which Invitation, there are four Particulars contained. 1. The Subjects concerned, *Israel*. i.e. the Lords Covenant People. The very name of *Israel*, did put them in mind of the Covenant that was between the Lord and them. They were descended from *Israel* an holy man, that was eminently interested in Gods Covenant, and did themselves profess that they were the Lords People. 2. Here is the matter of the Invitation, in that word *Return*; implying, that they had not been duly mindfull of that Covenant and ingagement unto God, which was upon them, and that therefore it did concern them to Repent, and in that way to *Renew their Covenant*. 3. Here is the Object unto which they should return, *The Lord*. In the Hebrew it is [*gnad Jehovah*, usque ad Dominum] (*a*) *even as far as unto the Lord*: intimating, that they had departed farr from him, and that a continued and through Conversion was necessary. It was requisite, that they should not only begin to *Return*, but never leave Turning, until they were come quite over unto the Lord, so as to become wholly subject unto him in every thing. Even *unto the Lord*, who is here described from his Relation unto them as *their God, Thy God*. Which also doth respect the Covenant between God and them, whereby God became theirs, and they His. Both expressions doe imply strong Motives

(*a*) usque ad Dominum i.e. perfecte, non desistens, donec Deum contingas. *Oecolampadius* in locum, Ita *Mercerus* & alii.

tives unto Repentance. q. d. The Lord Jehovah, is an universal good, and the fountain of all mercies and good things, without whom there is no life, no happiness to be had or to be hoped for. Therefore Return unto him. And inasmuch as He is *Thy God*, He is gracious and willing to accept of thee, in case thou shalt unfeignedly Return unto Him. Therefore Return. 4. This duty is urged from the necessity of it, *For thou hast fallen by thine iniquity* (b) q. d. Thou art *Fallen* into a wofull pit of sin and misery, into a gulfe of destruction, and art not able to save thy self, so that there is no way left but this one, of Returning to thy God. Wherefore the Doctrine from the words, is,

(b) *Quoniam corruisti.* Metaphora a cæsis aut paupertibus in tenebris loco salebroso, quos incessit offendere et impingere et corruere. Pareus in Lor.

Doctr. *That when the Lords Covenant People are fallen by Iniquity, it doth highly concern them, to Return unto their God.*

There are three things may be enquired into for the clearing of this Doctrine, 1. What *Falling* in respect of Iniquity, it is, which the Lords People are subject unto? 2. What is implyed in this Returning which the Lord speaks of? 3. The Reason why the Lords People should Return unto him.

Q. 1. *What* Falling *in respect of Iniquity is it, that the Lords People are subject unto?*

Answ. 1. *The Lords own People are subject to decayes of Grace.* Indeed they that are sincere, cannot fall totally and finally, yet they may be subject to partial Apostasyes from God, and from his blessed wayes. They may be, and too often are, on the losing hand, as to the degrees and measures of Grace. There may be sad intermissions as to the timely actings & exercise of Grace. The Spouse in the Canticles, confesseth that she was asleep. And all the Virgins, (wise as well as foolish) slept and slumbred. Mat. 25.8. And it was said to the Church in *Ephesus*, Thou hast left (though not wholly *lost*) thy first Love, and that therefore they should remember whence they were *Fallen*, and do the first works. Rev 2.5. Intimating, that Grace was not so lively in them, nor were they so much in the practice of Religion, as sometimes they had been. Thus is it noted concerning Solomon, that in his *Old age*, when one would have thought, he should have walked most closely with God, *His heart was turned after other Gods, and he did evil in the sight of the Lord.* 1 Kin. 11.4,6. And Asa was much declined in his latter time: which judicious Interpreters (c) take to be the true meaning and intendment of

(c) Sic Furius et Malvenda.

that

that Scripture, 2 Chron. 17. 3. where it is ſaid of Jehoſaphat, that he *walked in the firſt wayes of David his Father*, ſo it is expreſſed in our Tranſlation, but in the Hebrew, the words run thus, *He walked in the wayes of David, of his father the firſt.* Now Aſa was Jehoſhaphats Father, and his *firſt wayes* were better then his laſt. He acted ſo in his latter times, as we doe not read the like of any good man, mentioned in the Scripture: whence a judicious Divine (*d*) doth queſtion whether Aſa was indeed a godly man, and whether that expreſſion of his *Heart being perfect*, doth intend any more, then his not being an Idolater, &c. But ſuppoſing him to have the root of the matter in him, it was a dreadfull Fall into iniquity that he was ſubject unto: Therefore,

(*d*) Mr. *Hooker* on Act. 2. 37. p. 661.

2. *The Lords own Servants may poſſibly fall into ſcandalous iniquity:* and that both as to Judgement and Practice. A godly man may for a time be tainted with a ſcandalous error: yea, with Hereſy in his Judgement, albeit he cannot live and dye ſo without Repentance and Recovery. Hence the Apoſtle ſaid to the Corinthians, *How ſay ſome among you, there is no Reſurrection from the dead?* 1 Cor. 15. 12. Whereas the denial of the Reſurrection is a fundamental error. Moreover, a godly man may become guilty of ſcandalous practices, both againſt the firſt Table, as we ſee in Aaron, who was by the people perſwaded and prevailed with to ſet up the golden Calfe in the Wilderneſs: And in Peter, who was once guilty of curſing and ſwearing falſely. As alſo againſt the ſecond Table, as we ſee in Davids Adultery, and in Noah's and Lot's being guilty of ſuch Intemperance, as is in the Scripture mentioned concerning them.

3. *They that are the Lords People in reſpect of a viſible Covenant Intereſt only, may fall totally and finally.* I ſay they may *Fall* totally: For though ſpecial Grace ſhall not, yet common Grace may be *wholly loſt*. Such Profeſſors may degenerate into meer Formaliſts, even ſo as to become dead, ſapleſs, & lifeleſs altogether, even *twice Dead* Jude 12. As having loſt thoſe Quicknings, and gracious Illuminations which once they had experience of. Yea, of forward *Profeſſors*, they may become bitter *Perſecutors*. Thus concerning Saul, that which he had was taken from him, his gifts and common graces withered; the Spirit of the Lord departed from him, and an evil ſpirit took poſſeſſion of him, that he became a moſt malignant Perſecutor of holy

David, whom once he had loved and honoured. And *Joash*, when a young man, was very forward and zealous in the wayes of God, but after the Death of his Uncle, under whom he had his education he did perſecute the Prophet *Zachary* (his next Couzen) unto Death, for bearing witneſs againſt his and the Peoples Apoſtaſy. And Alexander the Copper-ſmith, became a bitter & bloudy enemy to Paul, 2 Tim. 4. 14. & yet it is (†) conceived that that Alexander was the ſame, who when time was, ſtood up in the defence of, and ſhewed himſelf willing to ſuffer with that holy Apoſtle, Act. 19. 33. Yea, ſuch Profeſſors as are Hypocrites in Heart, may *Fall* finally as well as totally. The Apoſtle ſaith concerning *Demas*, *He hath forſaken me, having loved this preſent world.* 2 Tim. 4. 10. Which is the very deſcription of an unregenerate man. 1 Joh. 2. 15. Nor doth the Scripture ſay any thing of his *Return*: but in (e) Eccleſiaſtical Story, he is reported to be one that lived and died an Idolater. Nay, ſuch Profeſſors may poſſibly become guilty of the ſin againſt the Holy Ghoſt, which is alwayes attended with final Impenitency. They that have been enlightened, and had ſome taſt of the heavenly gift, may fall away ſo as that it ſhall be impoſſible to renew them by Repentance, Heb. 6. 4, 5, 6. So true is that word of Chriſt, *From him that hath not, ſhall be taken away that which he hath*, he that hath not true Grace, that common grace which he hath, he is in danger of loſing it.

(†) *Sic Grotius Eſtius* & alii in 2 Tim. 4. 14.

(e) *Dorotheus in Synopſi.*

4. *The Lords People may fall under heavy Judgements becauſe of their Iniquity.* (f) There is a falling *into* Iniquity, and a falling *by*, for, or becauſe of iniquity. Doubtleſs both are intended in the Text. Sore breaking Judgements are expreſſed in the Scriptures, by that of a miſerable *Fall*, Hoſ. 5. 5. *Iſrael and Ephraim ſhall* Fall *in their iniquity, Judah alſo ſhall* Fall *with them*: Iſrael, or Ephraim, h. e. the ten Tribes, had the worſt Fall, *viz.* in reſpect of the Aſſyrian Captivity, they Fell ſo as never to riſe again: But Judah Fell alſo, *viz.* under that Judgement of the Babylonian Captivity. The ſaddeſt temporal Judgements and Deſolations, may poſſibly overtake the People of God, inaſmuch as *their* Sins are moſt diſhonourable to his bleſſed Name. We hear the Church complaining, *Is there any Sorrow like unto my Sorrow, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger.* And the Prophet Daniel ſaith, *Under the whole heaven hath*

(f) Impegiſti, h. e. incidiſti in multas & graves Calamitates. *Druſius* in Locum.

hath not been done, as hath been done unto Jerusalem. Now when it is so, *Iniquity* is the cause of it. Isa. 3.8. *Jerusalem is ruined, and Judah is* [Fallen] *because their tongue and their doings are against the Lord, to provoke the eyes of his Glory.*

5. *The Lords People may* Fall *from their visible Church estate:* So did Israel, Jer. 3.8. *When backsliding Israel committed Adultery, I put her away, and gave her a bill of Divorce.* As for the ten Tribes, God hath called them *Loammi*, and written over them *Lo-ruhama*, saying, He would no more have mercy them on. Hos. 1.6,9. And some Learned men (r) have observed, that those Israelites that were carried into Captivity by the Assyrians, were many Ages since, swallowed up with *Gentilisme*, being (as to the Body of them) degenerated into meer Heathens. The Jews also are deprived of their Church estate: the Kingdome is taken from them, and given to the Gentiles, *i. e.* The Church of God (which is his Kingdome) is not now to be found amongst them, but among the Gentiles, who are planted in their Room. Hence, the Apostle speaketh of their *Fall*, Rom. 11.11 12. inasmuch as they are *Fallen* from their Relation to God as his visible *Covenant People*. And the like hath hapned unto many particular Gospel Churches, in these dayes of the New-Testament: witness all the Churches in Asia. In some places in the lesser Asia, where once glorious Churches were seen, at this day, there is not so much as one Christian. So in *Ephesus*, in *Laodicea*, not an house, not a man to be seen. In *Smyrna*, *Pergamus*, *Thyatira*, *Sardis*, *Philadelphia*, no Inhabitants except barbarous Turks, and a few superstitious Greeks who call themselves Christians (s) One that within these ten years did visit those desolate places, professeth, that he could not look upon such amazing Ruines without horror and Admiration. And there was once a famous Church in *Rome*; but the Lord hath long since given her a bill of Divorce: And therefore Paul spoke like a Prophet, when he said to the Church of *Rome*, *Behold the goodness & severity of God, on them which* Fell *severity, but towards thee goodness, if thou continue in his goodness; otherwise thou shalt be cut off.* Rom. 11.22. Nor is there any particular Church in the world, but this may in time befall it. Never any Church enjoyed such

(r) De Israelitis qui per captivitatem Assyriam transportati sunt, dicendum est, eos partim in Gentiles degenerasse, partim Judaicis Synagogis se adjunxisse, et cum iis coalluisse. *Voet.* Disput. de Converss. Judæor. p. 133, 144 145. Sic & *Hornbeck* in Disput. contra Judæos. Prolog. p. 4.

(s) Mr. *Thomas Smith* in his Survey of the 7 Churches in Asia as they now lye in their Ruins.

a Priviledge as that of *Indefectibility*, or impossibility of loosing their Church estate, which the *Romanists* do vainly pretend unto. Churches may degenerate, so as to lose that which is the true *Matter* of a Church, sc. visible *Saints*. *The faithfull City may become an Harlot: It was full of Judgement, Righteousness lodged in it, but now Murtherers. Isa.* 1.21. And they may lose that which is the *Form* of a Church, sc. *Covenant* with God and one another. Those two Staves, *Beauty* and *Bands*, may be broken, Zech. 11. 10, 14. Or, if Churches should not degenerate as to their Principles they may be unchurched other wayes, and by other means e.g. By Divisions: An House (so a *Church*, which is an *House* of God) divided cannot stand. Or, the Lord may remove Instruments whereby the affairs of his Kingdome in this or that place are managed. Sometimes the plucking up of one Pillar, maketh way for the whole house to Fall speedily and irrecoverably. Or a Storm of Persecution may arise, which shall blow the Lights out of the Candlesticks, yea and overset the Candlesticks too. The Church had like to have been carried away with that Flood of the *Arrian* Heresy and Persecution, Rev. 12. 15. In *Austins* time, whilst he was yet living, all the Churches in *Africa*, (excepting three) (*g*) were laid waste by the barbarous *Goths* and *Vandals*, whom the Lord let loose upon them, Yea, and so it was with the old Church of *Rome*, (*h*) they were (about 400. years after Christ) cut off by the sword of the *Goths* and *Vandals*, and another people, *viz.* those whom we call *Italians*, substituted in their room. Like as the ten Tribes being fallen to Idolatry, were destroyed by the Assyrians, and *Samaritans* placed in their stead.

(*g*) v. *Austin's* Life. p. 159, 160.

(*h*) See my Brothers Defence of the Protestant Religion against Popery. p. 13.

We come then to the second Enquiry, viz. *What is implyed in this* Returning *which the Text speaks of?*

Answ. It is the same with *Repentance*. Sin is a departing from God, but Repentance is a *Returning* to Him again. Wherefore Repentance is often expressed in the Scripture by that of *Turning* and *Returning* unto the Lord, and by that of *Conversion*, the Phrase being a *Metaphor* taken from those that are gone out of the right way, but doe Return back again into the way wherein they should goe. *Repentance* is nothing else but *a Turning from all Sin unto God*. It implyeth a change of the whole man. The mind is renewed. As in *Returning*, (*i*) there is a change

(*i*) v. Dr. *Sibs* on Hos. 14. P. 1.

change of the posture of the Body, so where there is Repentance the mind is bent quite another way. It was looking Sin-ward, Earth ward, Hell ward, but now is fixed upon God, and Christ, and Heaven. In *Returning* the further a man goeth from a place, the lesser doe things seem that he hath left behind him, so in Returning to God, the more a man doth *Return*, the world & the vanityes of it seem little, yea as nothing to him. Again, *Repentance* implyes a great Turn in the heart & affections, so that those sins and corruptions, which were most loved and delighted in, are become the most hatefull, as we see in *Returning* Ephraim, Hos. 14.8. *What have I any more to doe with Idols?* Before his *Return*, nothing so dear as Idols, but after that, nothing more abominable. *Repentance* implyeth also, a change in a mans Actions and Conversation. The true Penitent is *Turned* into another way, Isa. 55.7. *Let the wicked forsake his way, and let him Return unto the Lord.* He *was* in the way to Hell, but he *is* in the way to Heaven. He *was* going in the broad way, but *is* come about, and got into the narrow way, which leads to everlasting life.

Q. 3. *But why should the Lords People Return unto Him?*

A. I shall mention only that Reason implyed in the Text, namely, *The Consideration of the holy and gracious Covenant which they are under.* Return unto the Lord *thy God* O Israel: He is thy God, and therefore thou art to Return to Him. Therefore, this consideration of the Covenant is often used in the Scripture as an Argument to enforce Repentance, Jer. 3.14. *Turn O backsliding Children, for I am married unto you*, viz. in respect of the Covenant which was between God and them. And the Apostle calls upon the Jews to Repent and be Converted, Act. 3.19. and presseth his Exhortation with this Argument, *You are the children of the Covenant which God made with our Fathers*, v.25. So doe the Seals of the Covenant, ingage the subjects of them to repent and return unto the Lord more and more. Hence it is said of John, that he did *baptize unto Repentance*, Mat. 3.11. because those whom he baptized, were thereby ingaged to practise Repentance. Its true, that they who are in Covenant with God, are bound to walk closely with him and to be carefull that they doe not make work for Repentance. Nevertheless, in case they doe through Temptation fail and Fall, the *Covenant* doth ingage them to renew their Repentance, and to make hast to

Return unto the Lord again, when they have backſliden from Him. They that lye under their Falls, continue breaking the everlaſting Covenant. Moreover, the Lord in the Covenant of Grace, declareth unto men, that he will pardon their Sins, in caſe they doe unfeignedly *Return* unto him. The Goſpel is ſometimes called the Covenant. It was propheſied concerning Chriſt, that he ſhould *confirm the Covenant with many for one week*, i.e. for *ſeven years*, which is a *Prophetical Week*. The Lord Chriſt did himſelf (*t*) preach the Goſpel to the Jews for the ſpace of three years and an half, and after that (as ſome obſerve) his Apoſtles did offer the Goſpel other three years, and ſomething more, before ever they preached to the Gentiles. Thus was the *Covenant* confirmed for one week, Dan. 9. 27. Now the Goſpel doth command men every where to Repent, and doth promiſe the Remiſſion of Sins in caſe they doe ſo. And if they that are under the external offer of the Covenant only, are bound to repent, how much more they that are indeed in Covenant?

(*t*) L'empereur.

USE. Let us hence be exhorted, perſwaded and prevailed with to Return unto the Lord our God. Return unto thy God O Iſrael, O *New-England*, for thou haſt Fallen by thine iniquity.

Conſidor. 1. *What cauſe we have every one of us, to be Returning unto the Lord our God.* Certainly we have need to be turning from ſin & from the world, yet more & more. Repentance is the work of a Chriſtian as long as he liveth in this world. There are many that are in a ſtate of ſin; an *univerſal Repentance* is of abſolute neceſſity to every ſuch Soul. There are others that are under the prevailing power of ſome ſpecial Corruption or Temptation; and they ſtand in need of a *Particular Repentance*. Therefore Chriſt ſaid to his Diſciples, notwithſtanding their being converted as to their *State*, Matth. 18. 3. *Except ye be Converted, ye ſhall not enter into the Kingdome of Heaven*, meaning that except they were *converted* from that particular ſin of Pride, which was then too apparent in them, they could not be ſaved. And are there not many particular Perſons that are under woefull decayes as to their ſpiritual eſtate? Alas! they are not the ſame men that they were thirty or forty years agoe: And what cauſe have ſuch to be thinking of Returning to the Lord, from whom they have deeply revolted. Nay, is there not a general

Declen-

Declenſion amongſt Profeſſors in *New-England*! May we not confeſs, as the Lords People ſometimes did, Jer. 14.7. *Our Iniquities teſtifie againſt us, for our Backſlidings are many.* Again, that which is ſpoken, Jer. 2.21. may in too ſad a degree be applyed unto *New-England*, *I planted thee a noble Vine, wholly a right ſeed, how then art thou turned into the degenerate Plant of a ſtrange Vine unto me.* How did the Power of Godlineſs flouriſh in this Land, and in theſe Churches, when time was! But is it ſo at this day? Is there not a general decay as to the power of godlineſs? How have Chriſtians left their firſt Love? It was an Expreſſion in the Sermon preached on the day when this Church was gathered, (+) near upon thirty years agoe, *It is too plain to be denied, that there is a dying Spirit in New-England to the Wayes of God.* If it were ſo then, how much more now? Men have forgot their Errand into this Wilderneſs, *What came ye into the Wilderneſs to ſee?* It hath often and truely been ſaid, That *New-England* differs from other *ontgoings of our Nation*, in that Religion was the deſign of our Fathers in tranſporting themſelves and Familyes into this waſt and howling Wilderneſs. But men are *now* purſuing a worldly Intereſt, with their whole hearts. The things of God, and the great Concernments of his Holy Kingdome, are not ſought after in the firſt place. If the body of the preſent ſtanding *Generation*, be compared with what was here forty years agoe, What a ſad Degeneracy is evident to the view of every man, that hath his heart exerciſed, in diſcerning things of this nature?

(+) By Mr. *Samuel Mather*, my moſt dear, and now bleſſed Brother.

Conſider 2. *How ſolemnly God hath been calling upon us to Return.* And that more wayes then one. By leſſer and greater Judgements. The Lord hath come upon us, as a moth, and after that as a Lion, in tearing wrath, and furious Judgements, that have rent & born down all before them. When lighter Afflictions would not do, the Lord hath made bare his Arm againſt us, brandiſhing a glittering Sword, making it bright for the ſlaughter, yea, & drunk with blood, & *the voice of the Lord* was in it, calling aloud from Heaven, *Return unto thy God, O New-England, for thou haſt Fallen by thine Iniquity.* The Lord hath alſo ſent the deſtroying Angel among us, with a beſom of deſtruction, whereby many hundreds were ſwept away into the Land of darkneſs. Ah! poor *New-England*; Ah! poor *Boſton*; wilt thou not yet hear, & turn

and

and live? Once more, The Lord hath fallen upon us of late, and rendred his Rebukes in flames of Fire. May not we call the Name of this place *Taberah*, becauſe the Fire of the Lord hath burnt amongſt us? Come and behold the deſolations which the Lord hath made. Bewaile the burning which the Lord hath kindled. What is *the voice of the Lord* in all theſe ſolemn diſpenſations, if this be not it? *O New-England, and thou Boſton eſpecially, Return unto the Lord thy God, for thou haſt fallen by thine Iniquity.*

And O Congregation, hear the Word of the Lord. We in this Congregation, in a more peculiar manner, have been under ſolemn and awakening calls from Heaven. When the Veſſel was blown up in the harbour five years agoe, and ſeveral deſireable perſons loſt their lives, what a ſolemn blow was that. The Lord hath made aweful breaches upon us. One of this Church (†) and a moſt deſireable and uſeful man, that dyed by the Sword of the Heathen: and ſome by (†) the late mortal Contagion, and divers, that by other providences have been taken away from us. God hath thinned our glory. And do we not remember the diſmal Fire that was in this part of the Town above three years agoe, when *this houſe* was moſt deſolate, *the houſe wherein we have been wont to praiſe the Lord, was burnt with fire*; and this Candleſtick was then under aweful ſhakings. Some obſerve, (‡) that God uſeth to *move* the Candleſtick, before he doth quite *remove* it. Truly, God hath been *moving* this Candleſtick, and I muſt needs ſolemnly declare, that it looketh like an ominous ſign, that the Lord doth intend at laſt, to remove and break this Candleſtick, if there be not a returning to him. Let us not be high minded, but fear. God can bring it to paſs in one day, by one fatal ſtroke. O then, what cauſe have we, to ſay after the Lords people, *come, let us Return unto the Lord, he hath torn, He hath ſmitten*, Hoſ. 6. 1.

† Capt. *Lake.*
† Mr. *Brackenbury*, & ſeveral other hopefull and deſirable Perſons.

(‡) See Mr. *Fullers* Sermon on Rev. 2, 5.

Moreover, the Lord hath been calling upon his people in this Wilderneſs, by his Word and faithful Ambaſſadors, by whoſe mouth he hath threatned aweful Judgements, except we repent. The watchmen of Ephraim that have been with God, have blown the Trumpet, and given the Alarm. Not only by ſome who are yet alive, but *by the former Prophets*, who have finiſhed their courſe, and are gone to receive their Crown, the Lord hath been ſpeaking and ſolemnly warning this people. O *New England*, the

the day of thy Watch-men is come upon thee; even the day which thy Watch-men have told thee was coming. How inexcusable then shall we be, if we do not return? And the Lord hath very lately said, He would try one experiment more, with a sinful people, *it may be they will hear.* He hath therefore so ordered by his Providence, as that the Messengers of these Churches here met together in his Name, to enquire into the causes of that dismal displeasure, which hath been written against us, in fiery and bloody Characters; and to fix upon Scripture expedients for Reformation. If what cometh in that way, *and the voice of the Lord* in it be despised and rejected, we may fear, that there is a *woful day*, not far off. It was a serious and weighty word which a (*l*) faithful Minister of Christ, who liveth in another Colony, not long since expressed in a great Assembly, *Your hearing the mind of God, declared by the* Synod, *will be a signal Testimony of an humbled People; but if you will not hear what is so presented to you, I testifie unto you in the Name of the Lord, it may be written over your doors*, They are not humbled unto this day.

(*l*) Mr. Nathaniel Collins, Pastor of the Church in Middletown on Connecticot.

Consider. 3. *As yet there hath not been that Returning unto the Lord which ought to be, and which He doth expect from this People.* The generality of men doe not frame their doings to Turn unto the Lord. If they *Return*, it is not to the most High. It was a sad word which the Lord took up against his People of old Hos. 11.7. *My People are bent to backsliding from me: though they called them to the most High, none at all would exalt Him.* They that did *Return* when called upon thereunto, were so few, as that they seemed *none at all.* I doubt not, but that (through grace) there are many particular persons among us, unto whom God hath sanctified his awfull Dispensations, in order to their effectual Conversion and Reformation: but our misery is, in that there is no general Turning from Sin and World, unto God in Jesus Christ. Alas, that it may be said as in Am 4. *I have withholden the rain from you, yet have you not returned unto me saith the Lord. I have smitten you with blasting and Mildew: yet have ye not returned unto me: I have sent among you the Pestilence, after the manner of Egypt, your young men have I slain with the sword, and have taken away your horses; yet you have not Returned unto me.* He that was proud, is so still; he that was a Worldling, is so still; he that was a Pot-companion, & that did haunt Ale houses or Ordinaryes, doth so still. That

which is ſpoken of the Children of Iſrael, is ſadly true concerning the moſt of men amongſt us, Pſal. 78. 32. *For all this, they ſinned ſtill.* Devouring Plagues had been round about them, *for all this they ſinned ſtill.* Moſt wonderfull mercies and eminent deliverances did the Lord vouchſafe unto them: *For all this they ſinned ſtill.* And is it not ſo with us? War, Mortality, Fires have been amongſt us; Yet men continue ſinning ſtill. The Lord hath by a Miracle of mercy, reſtored peace and health to the Land, that the inhabitant thereof is not ſick: yet men continue ſinning ſtill.

Conſider. 4. *What bleſſed encouragement we have to be Returning unto God.* He had a delight in our Fathers, and hath choſen us their children to be his People. He is *Our* God ſtill. He hath not written over us *Lo-ammi* and *Lo-ruhamah.* As yet we have a day of Grace. As particular perſons, ſo Churches and Congregations have their *day of Grace.* Chriſt ſaid unto Jeruſalem, (and he wept when he ſaid it) O *that thou hadſt known in this thy day the things that belong unto thy peace,* Luke 19. 42. And O that in *this New-Englands Day,* we knew the things that belong unto our peace, before they be hid from our eyes. We may be happy, if we have an heart to conſider it. The Lord we ſee, is loth to make us as Admah, to ſet us Zeboim. He is not willing to give up his own Intereſt here: He waits to be gracious: He waits to ſee if we will Return unto him, that ſo we may be fit for mercy, and then we ſhall have it. O then, let us return *before* the Decree bring forth, *before* the day paſs as the chaff, *before* the day of the Lords anger come upon us. Therefore,

Conſider 5. *The good that will follow in caſe we do Return.* If we Return to the Lord, He will Return unto us, with mercies & bleſſings more then ever. Mal. 3. 7. *Even from the dayes of your Fathers, you are gone away from mine Ordinances, and have not kept them: Return unto me, and I will return unto you, ſaith the Lord of Hoſts.* The Lord will then make it appear that he is *our God,* & that he is *Jehovah.* As he was known unto his People in the years of ancient Generations by his Name *Jehovah,* when he did fulfil & give *Being* to his gracious Promiſes. Mark how the Prophet Daniel ſpeaketh, Ch. 9. v. 13. *that we might turn from our Iniquityes, and underſtand thy truth.* q.d. The Lord hath promiſed to ſave and bleſs thoſe that Turn from their iniquities: and if we had

had done ſo, we ſhould have known by gracious experience, the truth of Gods word. So then, if we Return, the benefit will be our own: Good will come unto our ſelves thereby: and to others too. Ezek. 18.30. *Repent and turn your ſelves*, ſo we read it, but the Hebrew word (m) [*Hehaſhibu*] ſignifieth, *to make to be Converted*, Repent and make others to be Converted. It is alwayes the property of true Repentance, that it maketh men endeavour that others may repent too. And uſually, if one Repent, another followeth: Examples are very powerfull: *your Zeal* ſaith the Apoſtle, *hath provoked many*, 2 Cor. 9.2. If one Church ſet a good example, it may be, many will follow: And then, O what glory will come to the bleſſed Name of God. If a People ſhould become *all Righteous*, the Lord is *glorified*, Iſa. 60. 21. And what joy doth this cauſe in heaven? If there be joy in Heaven, when one Sinner Returns unto God, how much more, when a whole Church ſhall become zealous and Repent, and ingage themſelves to a more cloſe and holy walking with God, then ever before?

(m) Converti facite. *Arias Montanus.*

Conſider. 6. *We muſt of neceſſity Return unto the Lord our God.* As ever we deſire to eſcape deſtruction, this concerns us. What an awfull Scripture is that, Jer. 15.7. *I will deſtroy my People, ſith they Return not from their wayes.* It is not being viſibly the Lords People; it is not the external enjoyment of ſpiritual Priviledges that can ſecure or ſave us, except we Return: We have no other way left in heaven or on earth, but this. We have many enemies, not only in Hell, but on Earth, ready to ſwallow us up, if the Lord be not on our ſide. If God be not our Friend, we are the miſerableſt people under heaven: And we have little reaſon to expect, that the Lord will ſtand by us, if we will not Return unto him. Either we ſhall have no deliverance, or none in mercy, if we Return not. It's true, that God to ſhew his Sovereignty, doth ſometimes ſave an Apoſtate People, as he did Iſrael in the dayes of Jehoahaz, and of Jeroboam the ſecond, 2 Kin. 13.5,6. & 14.27. But ſuch Deliverances leave men the more inexcuſable, and uſually end in the ſaddeſt deſtructions and deſolations, except there be Repentance.

Queſt. *But what ſhall be done that ſo we may Return unto the Lord our God?*

Anſw. *Let us* now *up and be doing.* The longer a perſon or

a People ſhall defer their Repentance, the harder work will they find of it: Jer. 13.23. *Can the Ethiopian change his ſkin, or the Leopard his ſpots? then may ye alſo doe good, that are accuſtomed to doe evill.* Therefore the Lord urgeth men unto preſent Obedience: Jer. 25.5. *The Lord hath ſent unto you all his Servants the Prophets, riſing early and ſending them,--- they ſaid, Turn ye again* [Now] *every one from his evill way, and from the evill of his doings.* Ephraim is an unwiſe ſon when he ſtayeth long in the birth. Is not Repentance a good work? And are not the *Expedients* in order thereunto good to be attended? Then the ſooner we doe it, the better. It was ſometimes ſaid to the Elders of Judah, *Why are ye the laſt to bring back the King to his houſe?* 2 Sam. 19.11. Every Church is an houſe of David (i.e. of Chriſt the true David) Why ſhould any of us, eſpecially, why ſhould any Churches ſeek to be the laſt that doe by Renewing their Repentance and ſolemn Ingagements unto the Lord, endeavour to eſtabliſh Chriſts Throne amongſt us.

2. *Let us pray and promiſe better Obedience.* O cry to Heaven as Ephraim did, *Turn thou me and I ſhall be turned.* Men ſay they cannot turn themſelves. Muſt they ſit ſtil then, & doe nothing, under pretence that God muſt do all? Nay, but they muſt ſtir up themſelves, and call upon God. It is a precious Truth, that the Lord has in his gracious Covenant, promiſed that his people ſhall return unto him: Nevertheleſs, he ſaith, *I will yet for this be enquired of by the houſe of Iſrael, to do it for them,* Ezek. 36.37 Nor is it enough for us to *pray*, but we muſt, (though not in our own ſtrength) *promiſe* better obedience. And this particular, doth not only ſuit with the ſolemn work, which we are now to attend, and which hath occaſioned our being thus before the Lord this day: but it is the very direction, which God himſelf doth give unto his Iſrael in this Context, that ſo they might become a Returned, Reformed people. *Take with you words, and turn to the Lord.* What words? even words of prayer; therefore it is added, *ſay unto him, take away all Iniquity*, &c. And words of promiſe too, *ſo will we render the Calves of our lips.* The Lord puts them upon promiſing, that they would live more to his praiſe and glory for the time to come, then ever they had done before. And accordingly we ſee them Renewing their Covenant, ver 3. *Aſſur ſhall not ſave us, we will not ſay any more, to the works of our hands*

hands, ye are our Gods. So that they engage againſt the ſpecial reigning ſins of the Times, which they had been guilty of, and that for the future, they would endeavour to love God more, and to ſerve him better.

And that this *Renewing of Covenant*, is a duty incumbent upon theſe Churches, (*n*) I have formerly ſhewed, and ſhall not now inſiſt much upon it, eſpecially conſidering, that there is a great voice out of the Temple calling unto it, I mean in reſpect of what the *Meſſengers of the Churches*, have lately and unanimouſly declared to be the mind of Chriſt concerning this matter. The Truth is, (*o*) that if there were no viſible Apoſtaſy amongſt us, yet it might be good to Renew our Covenant with God, that ſo we may be the better able to ſtand our ground, if a Temptation to forſake the Truth ſhould overtake us. The Children of Iſrael ſerved the Lord all the dayes of Joſhuah, yet he put them upon *Renewing their Covenant*, that ſo they might be kept from Apoſtaſy for the future, Joſh. 24. 27,

(*n*) In a *Sermon* on Neh. 9 38, publiſhed 3 years agoe.

(*o*) See Mr. *Willards* Sermon on Joſh. 24. 22.

There ſeems to be an hour of Temptation coming upon *all the World*, i. e. upon the *Churches* of Chriſt *diſperſed throughout the World*, Prov. 3. 8. And if ſo, theſe New Engliſh-Churches, muſt expect a day of Trial ere long, though what the particular Temptation will be, is with God. Now for us, in the moſt ſolemn manner, to Renew our Ingagements to the Lord, and one to another, is the way (by the grace of Chriſt) to ſtand faſt in the Profeſſion of the Faith, and order of the Goſpel. There (*p*) is miſerable perfidiouſneſs in the Revolting hearts of men, upon which accounts, all Bonds that may be, are expedient and neceſſery. Yet I perceive, that there are needleſs ſcruples and objections in the minds of men, againſt ſo good and holy a work.

(*p*) See Dr. *Reynolds* on Hoſ. 14. p. 71.

1. Some object, *what need any particular ſins be mentioned, muſt we tell the World of our particular ſins?*

Anſw. As for ſecret ſins, which only God knoweth of, men ought not to declare them before the World; But ſuch evils as are publick, they ought publickly and particularly to be engaged againſt. Thus when the Lords people renewed their Covenant in Nehemiahs Time. They did engage particularly againſt thoſe evils of unlawful Marriages, Oppreſſion, Sabbath breaking, neglect of Divine Inſtitutions, &c. which were the ſpecial prevailing iniquities of that Time and place, Neh. 10, 30. 31, 35. A general

confeſſion of ſin, is not true Repentance, except there be this and that particular ſin bewailed before the Lord. No more are general promiſes for Reformation ſufficient.

Object. 2. Some ſay, *our Fathers forty years agoe, did not practiſe any ſuch Renewing of Covenant, as that which is now urged, nor did they approve of it.*

Anſw. If when Aſa called upon the Lords people to attend this work, they ſhould have put it of, by ſaying, in the dayes of David (your great grand-Father) there was no ſuch thing practiſed, and therefore why ſhould we do it now? Had it not been eaſy to Anſwer, the ſtate of things then and now doth greatly differ. There is more cauſe, and a greater call, to attend ſuch a duty now, then there was then. The like may be ſaid in this caſe. There was not ſuch Pride, Intemperance, Formality in Religion, & other evils amongſt Profeſſors, as is now to be ſeen, and therefore not ſo much need to engage againſt thoſe ſins formerly, as at this day. Nor is it truly ſaid that this is any *new Practice*, or not approved of by thoſe, who were Inſtruments in the hand of Chriſt, in planting theſe Churches. For they proceeded much upon this Principle, (q) *That Renovation of Covenant is an expedient for Church Reformation.* And their practice was accordingly. They were in Covenant with God, before they knew this Land; and therefore what they did here, was a Renewing of Covenant.

(p) v. *Norton* in Reſp. ad App. pol. c. 2. & *Ames*. Theol. l. 1. Cap. 32. and *Parker* de Eccleſ. Polit. Cap. 3. p. 172, 173.

Object. 3. *But what ſhall become of the old Covenant?*

Anſw. If when Moſes called upon the Children of Iſrael to Renew their Covenant in the plains of Moab, Deut. 29. 1. it ſhould have been ſaid, but what ſhall become of the old Covenant, which we entred into at Horeb, forty years agoe? Would it not have been replyed, that Covenant is hereby, not nullified but confirmed. So is that Covenant which we are now engaging our ſelves unto the Lord by, a confirmation of what hath been formerly done by us. There is not any one particular mentioned in this Covenant, which is a *new* duty, or not required in the everlaſting Covenant, nor indeed any thing but what was contained in that expreſſion of the Covenant formerly. *We promiſe to cleave unto the Lord as our God, & to him only, and to the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, as our only Prieſt, Prophet and King.* He that obſerveth the firſt and great Commandment, can not but keep all the reſt.

So

So if this general and comprehenſive Covenant be duely remembred and obſerved, no more is required. The particulars which this Covenant is branched out into, do but explain and ſo confirm our former Ingagements. And it is of great advantage, to have the Covenant thus particularly expreſſed and explained, that ſo any one may ſee what they are bound unto.

Object. 4. *Although the Old-Teſtament ſpeaketh much about Renewing Covenant, yet we read nothing of that matter in the New-Teſtament.*

Anſw. And is the Old-Teſtament become Apocrypha in theſe dayes? Men conſider not, that by this Objection they ſtrike at the Foundation of all theſe Churches, & introduce a principle, that is deſtructive to the very *Form* and *being* of a *Congregational Church*. Where doth the New-Teſtament in ſo many expreſs words ſpeak of any explicite Church Covenant? The New Teſtament is more ſparing, as to the mentioning of things, abundantly inſiſted on, in the Old-Teſtament. When the Anabaptiſts object, that the New-Teſtament ſaith nothing of Childrens right to the Seal of the Covenant; do we not rightly anſwer them, but their right thereunto is plainly aſſerted in the Old-Teſtament, and no where repealed in the New? even ſo, we have Examples for *Renovation of Covenant* in the Old Teſtament, and it is no where condemned in the New. But as the Judgements which befel the Lords people of old were recorded for our Admonition, ſo the courſe which they took, in order to Reformation, is written for our Inſtruction and Imitation, 1 Cor. 10. 11. It is a great Truth, that practices mentioned in the Old Teſtament, not peculiar to that *Pædagogi*, but of moral and perpetual Equity, do bind men in the dayes of the Goſpel; and of this ſort, is the Renovation of Covenant, with the Lord our God. Nor muſt it be granted, that the New-Teſtament is a ſtranger to any ſuch practice. For the Jews that we read of in the ſecond Chapter of the *Acts*, were in Covenant with God, before *the Time of Reformation* came, as the Apoſtle ſpeaketh, Heb 9. 10. yet it is paſt doubt, that when three thouſand were added to them, (i. e. to the Church at Jeruſalem) they renewed their Covenant with God, and with the Lord Jeſus Chriſt. And I would deſire thoſe that make this Objection, to give us an Inſtance of any Goſpel Church which being under *ſpiritual declenſions*, was recovered from their backſlidings,

backſlidings, without Renewing their Covenant. When the Churches in Aſia, (ſome of them) *had fallen by their Iniquity*, the Lord Jeſus called upon them to Repent and Return, and that implyeth that they ought to attend Scripture expedients for Reformation; of which this Renovation of Covenant is none of the leaſt.

Object. 5. Some ſay, *The Covenant is ſo ſtrict, we ſhall make men afraid to joyn to the Church?*

Anſw. The Covenant is no ſtricter then God hath made it, who ſaith unto every one that hates to be Reformed, *What haſt thou to doe to take my Covenant into thy mouth?* In the Covenant which we are about to Renew, there is nothing expreſſed but plain clear datyes, required in the Goſpel. They that are ſincere will not be afraid of Church Communion, becauſe they muſt be under obligation to practiſe according to the Scripture. And as for thoſe that are not ſincere, they are better out of the Church then in it. It was a mercy to the primitive Church, (*m*) when as thoſe that were not true Believers *no man durſt joyn himſelf unto them.* Act. 5. 13, 14. The fewer Hypocrites (who are loth to come up to the practice and power of godlineſs) in a Church, the better. Though ſuch will *creep in unawares*, Jude. 4. yet we ſhould not let them in, if we knew them to be ſuch. *Sincere* Profeſſors are *Golden* Members; and therefore to have Churches conſiſt of ſuch, as much as may be, is the way to have them continue *Golden Candleſticks*.

(*m*) Read Mr. *Cotton* of the holineſs of Church-members.

Object. 6. *This Covenant is either of Grace or of works: if of works, we dare not meddle with it: if of Grace, why ſhould we Renew it?*

Anſw. How is it poſſible for any underſtanding Chriſtian to imagine, that a *Covenant* made with God through *Jeſus Chriſt*, is the Covenant of works, or that a Covenant wherein men profeſs themſelves *unable* to doe any thing *of themſelves*, and that wherein they fail in their Obedience, they look for pardoning mercy through the *Mediator*, is a Covenant of works? All which is true with reference unto the Covenant before us. And whereas it is ſaid that men under the Covenant of Grace, need not to Renew their covenanting with God, nothing can be ſpoken more contrary to Scripture, or to the practice of Saints. Was not Jacob under the Covenant of Grace? Was he in a ſtate of Salvation by virtue of any other Covenant then that of Grace? Yet in the time of his diſtreſs, he Renewed his Covenant, in giving himſelf up to God, and promiſing to cleave unto the Lord as *his God*. Gen. 28. 20. Doth not Faith in Chriſt give men an Intereſt in the Covenant of Grace? Then as often as Believers renew their cloſing with Chriſt, they doe on their parts, Renew their Covenant. But they that doe already believe, may and ſhould again and again give themſelves up to the Lord Jeſus. Joh. 2. 11. Chriſtians, every time that they worſhip the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, and more eſpecially in that Ordinance of the Lords Supper, doe implicitly *Renew* their *Conſent* to the *Covenant of Grace*. And if an implicit *Renovation* of Covenant be neceſſary, then ſometimes to doe it after the moſt ſolemn and expreſs manner that may be, will certainly tend to the glory of God, and to the good of Souls.

Obj. 7. In the laſt place ſome object, *What ſhould we Renew Covenant for, we ſhall not keep Covenant when we have done?*

Anſw. That's no good Objection. It makes me think of the man who

Luther

Luther ſpeaketh of, that had made many Vows to God, but broken them all; and therefore he reſolved, that for the future, he would live at a looſe end, and covenant no more, that ſo he might be at the more liberty to ſin. Is it ſo with any of your ſouls? Then in the Name of God, how can you, how dare you approach unto the Table of the Lord? I ſolemnly declare unto you in the Name of the Lord Jeſus, that if any man or woman amongſt you, be ſecretly in league with ſin, and therefore unwilling to be further ingaged to the holy and glorious God, you will eat and drink Judgement to your ſelves, and the oftner you come to that ſacred Ordinance, the greater will your Damnation be at the laſt day. Let us every one be ſincere and watchfull, then ſhall we *Keep Covenant*. 1. Be *Sincere*: let us not give up our Names only, but our Hearts unto God in Jeſus Chriſt. It is recorded concerning the Lords People in the dayes of Aſa, *that they entered into a Covenant to ſeek the Lord God of their Fathers, with all their heart and with all their ſoul*, 2 Chron. 15.12. Let us be ſure that our hearts be in this work: then ſhall we be like to keep Covenant when we have done; otherwiſe not. Good Joſiah, when he renewed Covenant, he did it *with all his heart*, 2 Chron. 34.31. And thence he performed what he promiſed. But the People too generally did what they did, out of compliance with him, but their hearts were not in it, Jer. 3.10. And therefore they quickly broke their Covenant with God. O then let us be ſincere in this matter. 2. And *Watchfull*. For a ſincere godly man may be guilty of great violations of the *Covenant*, and by his iniquity in that reſpect, fall under the heavy judging hand of God; and all this for want of due *Watchfulneſs*. How have the Lords Servants come to Fall after ſuch a fearfull manner, as ſome of them have done, and that ſoon upon the moſt ſolemn Ingagements unto God? But becauſe they did not duely *Watch*, and take heed to their ſpirits leſt they ſhould deal treacherouſly. Peter renewed his Covenant with the Lord Jeſus, when he promiſed never to forſake him, but to dye rather; and yet he preſently acted contrary to that Ingagement, becauſe he depended too much upon his own ſtrength, and was not *humbly watchfull* as he ought to have been.

Laſtly, *Look up to Chriſt*. O look unto Jeſus: let us look unto him for pardoning mercy. He hath offered Sacrifice, whereby Attonement is made for the whole Congregation. Look to Him for all ſupplyes of grace continually. He hath grace enough for us all. Joh. 1.16. *Of his fullneſs have we all received grace for grace*. And what is all that can be done or thought of, without Chriſt? What are *Vows* and *Covenants* except Chriſt be in them? Alas! many poor ſouls, when outward or inward diſtreſs and anguiſh is upon them, they will vow and ſwear to God that they will never commit ſuch & ſuch ſins any more: & yet when ſtrong temptations come, they break all bonds, & their corruptions are as much unmortified as ever. Why? Becauſe they promiſe in their own ſtrength, and know not what it is by Faith to fetch ſupplyes of grace and ſtrength from the blood, and from the Spirit of the Lord Jeſus. We ſay in that *Covenant*, which we are here met before the Lord to ingage our ſouls in this day, that we will doe this and the other thing which God requireth [*by the help of Chriſt*] must

O remember that it ~~must~~ be by the Help of Chriſt, if we doe any thing. And therefore let us depend upon God in Jeſus Chriſt, to doe all our works in us and for us. *Amen Lord Jeſus!*

Tibi Domine.

The Covenant *which was unanimouſly conſented unto, is as followeth.*

WE, who through the exceeding Riches of the Grace and Patience of God, doe yet continue Members of this Church; being now aſſembled in the holy Preſence of God, and in the Name of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt; after humble Confeſſion of our manifold breaches of Covenant before the Lord our God, and earneſt ſupplication for pardoning mercy through the blood of Chriſt, and deep acknowledgment of our great unworthineſs to be owned as the Lords Covenant People: Alſo acknowledging our inability to keep Covenant with God, or to perform any ſpiritual duty, unleſs the Lord Jeſus doe enable us thereunto by his Spirit dwelling in us: And being awfully ſenſible, that it is a dreadfull thing, for ſinfull duſt and aſhes, perſonally to tranſact with the infinitely glorious Majeſty of Heaven and Earth; We do, in humble confidence of his gracious aſſiſtance, and acceptance through Chriſt, each one of us, for our ſelves, and joyntly as a Church of the living God, explicitly renew our Covenant with God, and one with another, in manner and form following. That is to ſay,

We do give up our ſelves unto that God, whoſe Name alone is Jehovah, Father, Son, and holy Spirit, as the only true and living God, And unto our bleſſed Lord Jeſus Chriſt, as our only Saviour, Prophet, Prieſt, and King over our Souls, and only Mediator of the Covenant of grace; promiſing (by the help of his Spirit and grace) to cleave unto God as our chief good, and unto the Lord Jeſus Chriſt by Faith, in a way of Goſpel Obedience, as becometh his Corenant People for ever. We doe alſo give up our Offſpring unto God in Jeſus Chriſt; avouching the Lord to be our God, and the God of our children: And our ſelves with our children to be his people; humbly adoring this grace of God, that we and our Offſpring with us, may be looked upon as the Lords.

We doe alſo give up our ſelves one unto another, in the Lord; according to the will of God; freely covenanting and binding our ſelves to walk together, as a right ordered Congregation and Church of Chriſt; in all the wayes of his Worſhip, according to the holy Rules of the word of God: promiſing in brotherly Love, faithfully to watch over one anothers Souls, and to ſubmit our ſelves unto the Diſcipline and government of Chriſt in his Church, and duely to attend the Seals, cenſures, or whatever Ordinances Chriſt hath commanded to be obſerved by his People, according to the order of the Goſpel, ſo far as the Lord hath, or ſhall reveal unto us by his Word and Spirit.

And whereas, the Meſſengers of theſe Churches, who have met together in the Name of Chriſt, to enquire into the Reaſon of the Lords Controverſy with this his People, have taken notice of many provoking evils, as the procuring cauſes of the Judgements of God upon New-England, ſo far as we, or any of us have been guilty of ſin in reſpect of any of them, we deſire from our hearts to bewail it before the Lord, and humbly to entreat for pardoning mercy, for the ſake of the blood of the Everlaſting Covenant.

And as an expedient unto Reformation of thoſe, or whatever evils have provoked the eyes of Gods glory amongſt us; We doe ſubjoyn unto our Church Covenant a further Engagement, whereby we doe, as in the preſence of God, promiſe,

1. That

1, That we will (by the help of Christ) labour every one of us, to Reform his own heart and life, by seeking to mortify all our Sins, and endeavouring to walk more closely with God, then ever we have done, and to uphold the power of godliness; and that we will continue to worship God in publick, private, secret, and this (as God shall help us) without Formality and Hypocrisie; and more fully and faithfully then heretofore, to discharge all Covenant dutyes one towards another in a way of Church Communion.

2. We promise (by the help of Christ) that we will endeavour to walk before God in our houses, with a perfect heart: and that we will uphold the worship of God therein continually, according as he in his word doth require, both in respect of Prayer, and reading the Scriptures, that so the word of Christ may dwell richly in us; And that we will do what in us lyeth, to bring up our Children for Christ, that they may become such, as they that have the Lords Name put upon them by a solemn dedication to God in Christ, ought to be; and that therefore we will (so far as there shall be need of it) Catechize them, and exhort and charge them to fear and serve the Lord, and endeavour to set an holy Example before them, and be much in Prayer for their Conversion and Salvation.

3. We do further engage (the Lord helping of us) to do what in us is, that we may be pure from the sins of the Times, even those provoking Evils that have brought the Judgements of God upon New-England; And in our places to endeavour the suppression thereof; and that we will make Conscience to walk so, as that we may not give occasion to others to sin, or to speak evil of our holy Profession.

Now that we may observe and keep this sacred Covenant, and all the branches of it inviolable for ever, we desire to deny our selves, to depend wholly upon the power of the eternal Spirit of Grace, and upon the free mercy of God, and upon the merit of Jesus Christ, and where we shall fail, there to wait upon the Lord Jesus for pardon, and for acceptance, and for healing, for his Names sake.

FINIS.